



## Bright Spots programme findings

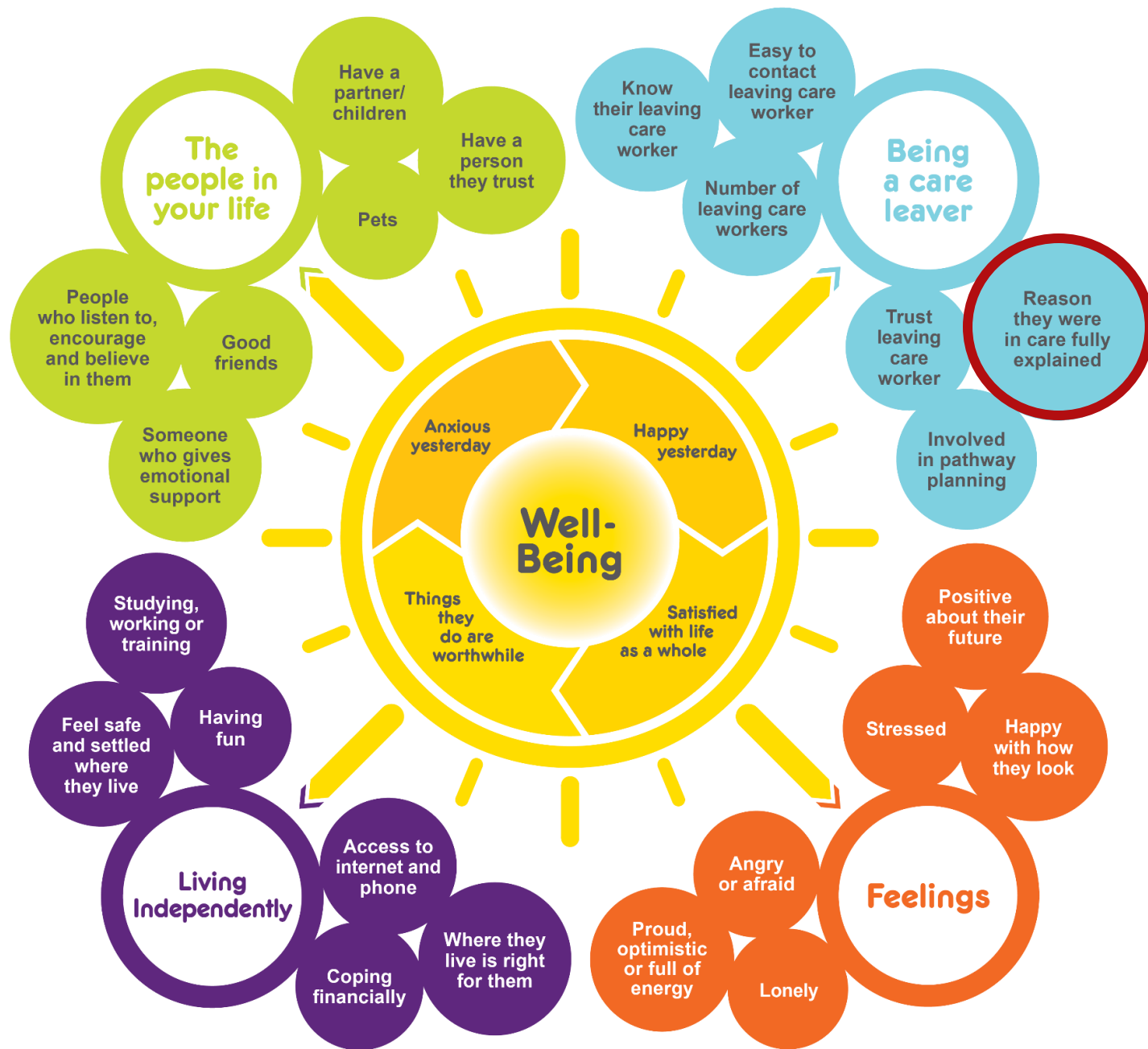


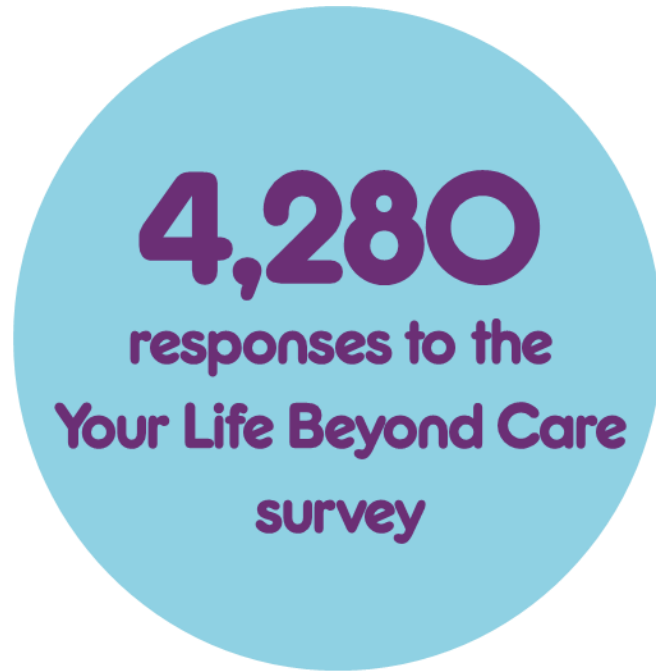
*Identity: care leavers' views on understanding why they are in care*

*Dr. Claire Baker (Feb, 2022)*

# Bright Spots Well-being indicators

Addressing care leavers well-being must include a focus on the things that they themselves feel make their lives good.





# Why is this important?



Understanding who we are and where we come from is a crucial component of identity development.



Developing a positive personal identity and a sense of personal history is associated with high self-esteem and emotional well-being (NICE, 2013).

# Why is this important?



Every child and young person who comes into care should know why and have opportunities to discuss the reasons this happened whenever they feel unclear.



When children don't have these opportunities, it can lead young people to feel insecure, unwanted, and blame themselves - factors that can have a severe negative impact on their self-worth and well-being (Staines and Selwyn, 2019).

# Why is this important?



Supporting young people to understand who they are and where they come from is recognised as good social work practice.

- However, some young people feel strongly that the care system does not sufficiently equip them with an understanding of their background and personal history. They have outstanding questions (Care Inquiry, 2013)
- Some want more help to understand what has happened in their life (Care Inquiry, 2013).
- One of the main barriers to positive identity development is the failure to help young people understand their background and pre-care experiences (Ferguson, 2018).

*It's important to know your first words, your birth weight, what time you were born...many a time I've thought 'what time was I born?' when you don't know it's hard. I could wake up at that time and think 'I was born at that time'.*

*People don't give enough consideration as to when they put us kids into care how we are feeling and what we want to know. They call it life story work I think, but they don't really do it. I have a memory box but I want information and facts.*

# Understanding reason for being in care

*I would like someone to talk to about my feelings and tell me about my past. I would like to see a picture of my dad so I know what he looks like. I would like to see a picture of me as a baby. I have never seen a picture of me. I have a lot of questions that no-one answers.*  
(11-18yrs)

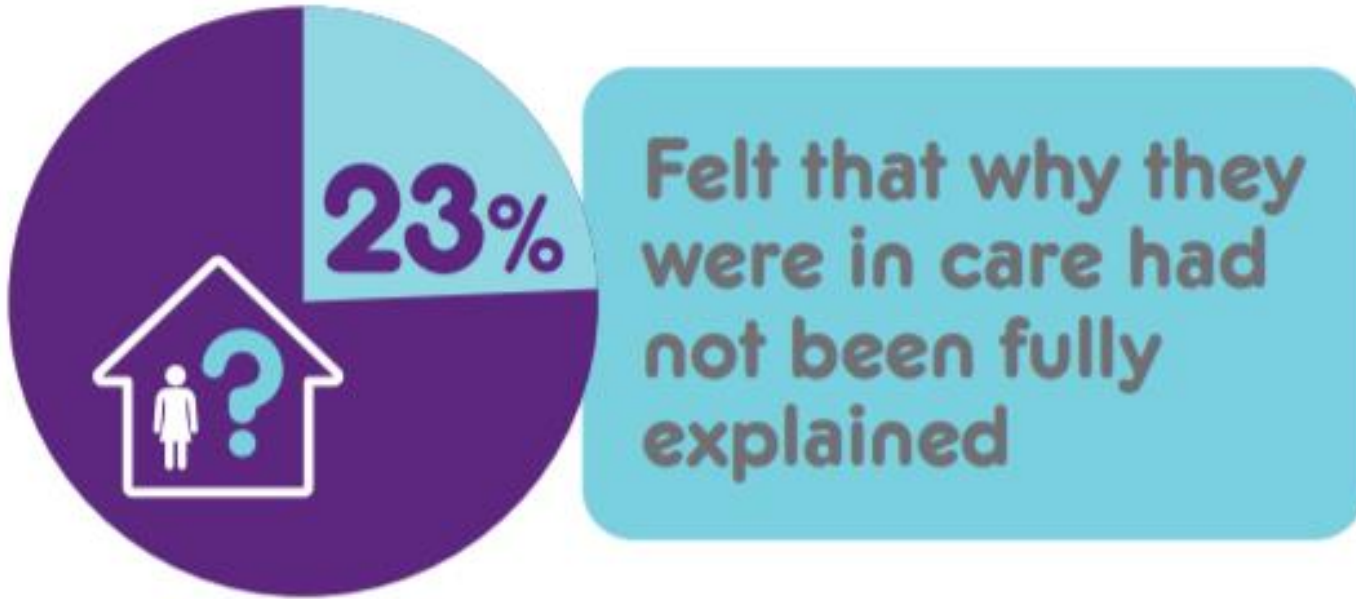
**Someone has fully explained why I am in care.**



*“I would like to know more about why I am in care and why I am not living with my mum.”* (4-7yrs)



# Care leavers



- Most care leavers (77%) felt that someone had given them sufficient explanation of why they had been looked after
- But 18% wanted to know more
- 5% thought that no-one had explained the circumstances

# Care leavers

Percentage of care leavers who do not know why they were in care or would like to know more



## bright spots

### Spotlight on East Riding

A larger proportion of **East Riding's** care leavers reported they had received a full explanation as to why they were in care compared to care leavers in other local authorities. One reason for this may be because the Pathway Planning process contains a specific question in the 'identity and interests' section which asks:

***Do you have any questions about why you became looked after?*** The question acts as a trigger for discussions and is a prompt for leaving care workers to check with their young person every now and again whether they feel happy with the knowledge they have and to ask if there is any support they need with this area.

# National news article

*I wasn't told why I was taken into care. For years I thought it was my fault. Kerrie Portman*

“The lack of clarity leaves many young people with lost pasts, struggling to form a stable identity. How can you begin to adjust to a new situation, to feel safe and settled, when you don't even know how you got there?... Unfortunately, my social worker never explained why I was taken into care and the idea that I was to blame tore me apart, solidifying in my mind that there was something deeply wrong with me. Even now, six years on, I still don't fully understand...I feel sad that I will probably never fully understand why I was taken into care. Although I now know it wasn't my fault, I have a sense of underlying worry and confusion.”

“Local authorities can play a vital role in helping children and young people gain this understanding, both in terms of the sequence of events that led them to being in care and the emotional understanding that it's not their fault. If all social workers took time to ensure that young people understood what had happened to them and why, it would give those young people a better chance of reaching their full potential, which should be the goal for every care experienced person.”

<https://www.theguardian.com/society/2020/jan/20/wasnt-told-why-taken-into-care>



# Film link

When a door closes, a better door opens

<https://youtu.be/0cxazS0iln0>



# What does this mean for me & my service?

- Do you know if your care leavers have outstanding questions or things they want to know?
- Who needs to be involved in helping care leavers to find out about those things?

Discuss in your team meetings or supervision

# References

- Bright Spots team (2019) Bright Spots insight paper: Understanding why you are in care, Coram Voice and the Rees Centre. Accessed at: [https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Bright-Spots-insight-paper-Understanding-why-you-are-in-care\\_compressed-1.pdf](https://coramvoice.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Bright-Spots-insight-paper-Understanding-why-you-are-in-care_compressed-1.pdf)
- Care Inquiry (2013) *Making not breaking: building relationships for our most vulnerable children*
- Ferguson (2018) “Could an Increased Focus on Identity Development in the Provision of Children’s Services Help Shape Positive Outcomes for Care Leavers?” A Literature Review, *Child Care in Practice*, 24:1, 76-91
- NICE (2013) *Looked after children Quality standard (QS 31)*
- Furnivall, J. (2011) *Attachment-informed practice with looked after children and young people*. Glasgow: IRISS
- Staines, J, & Selwyn, J. (2020) “I wish someone would explain why I am in care”: the impact of children and young people’s lack of understanding of why they are in out-of-home care on their well-being and felt security. *Child and Family Social Work*, 1– 10.
- Winter (2015) *Supporting positive relationships for children and young people who have experience of care*, IRISS
- Winterburn (2015) *FINDING THEIR FEET Equipping care leavers to reach their potential*, Centre for Social Justice

See: [www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots) for all Bright Spots publications

# bright spots

Find out more about the Bright Spots programme and read the full research reports on our website.

[www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots](http://www.coramvoice.org.uk/brightspots)

[brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk](mailto:brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk)

